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ABSTRACT

To devise a list of functional sight vocabulary words, a search was made of numerous curriculum guides and books, school district curricula, and several commercial materials purporting to teach such words. This search provided 16 word lists with a total of 466 different words and symbols. The word lists ranged from as few as five words to as many as 230 words, with the average being 83.5 words. While 32 words were included on at least one-half of the word lists, only one word, "stop," was included on all word lists. The words were divided into six categories based on their intent or meaning, including pedestrian mobility, toilet facilities, entrance/exit, warnings, traffic, and other words providing information not covered in the other categories. (Guidelines and suggestions for classroom use of the 466-word and 34-word lists are offered, and the two word lists are appended.) (RL)

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Which Words Shall They Learn?

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Which Words Shall They Learn?

People avoid hazards by responding appropriately when a container is labeled "poison" or if they see the sign "caution". They locate restrooms by heeding the signs "men" and "women" affixed to doors. These and other words are posted conspicuously to convey information and to warn persons of danger. A working knowledge of such words contributes to a person's independence and safety in the home or community.

Words associated with everyday life such as those found on road signs and on consumer goods are often contained on lists called survival vocabularies, community protective vocabularies, safety words, or even social signs. Other specialized vocabulary lists include words associated with driving a car or obtaining a job. The common denominators among these word lists are that they have functional utility for an individual and are usually taught as sight words. Therefore, these specialized sets of words comprise a functional sight vocabulary.

Functional sight vocabularies provide a practical and time saving alternative to teaching regular reading vocabularies for certain populations of students. If students are expected to achieve only limited reading skills, a functional vocabulary ensures that they will be able to read a sufficient number of words to use a cookbook, ride a bus, or

complete a job application. Even if these goals are thought to be beyond the grasp of students, then a knowledge of common safety words and lavatory words may suffice.

While few would argue the importance of a functional sight vocabulary, the composition of such a list is debatable. Functional sight vocabulary lists vary greatly depending on their source, author, or intent. In fact, no universally accepted list of functional sight vocabulary words has as yet been devised.

In an attempt to devise such a list, a search was made of numerous curriculum guides and books, school district curricula and several commercial materials purporting to teach community words. This search provided 16 word lists, and yielded a total of 466 different words and symbols (see Table 1). The source lists are referenced at the end of this article.

Insert Table 1 About Here

Obviously, a list of 466 functional sight vocabulary words has limited usefulness. In most cases it would be neither necessary nor possible for a minimally proficient reader to read all the words on this list. In addition, a number of the words contained on the combined list are specific to a given region. For example, "inspection

station" may be useful for a motorist in Pennsylvania, but not for one in Idaho because the latter state does not require automobile inspections. Further, the word "inspection station" would only be important to a person who drives a car.

Developers of functional sight vocabulary word lists do not agree on the number of functional words students should learn or even on the most critical words to include on such a list. Word lists ranged from as few as five words to as many as 230 words (average 83.5 words). As a rule, commercially published word lists included fewer words than those developed by school districts. Minimal agreement was also apparent when the frequency of words across lists was analyzed. The majority of the functional sight vocabulary words were located on only one or two word lists. While 32 words were included on at least one-half of the word lists; only one word, "stop" was included on all word lists. These high frequency words are shown on table 2.

Insert Table 2 About Here

The words on Table 2 are divided into six categories based on their intent or meaning. Wait/Don't Wait words are associated with pedestrian mobility. Lavatory words identify toilet facilities.

Go In/Out words tell the reader where and how to enter or to leave a building. Warnings include words which mean "stay away" and words which tell a person not to engage in an activity. Other words provide information common to everyday independent functioning not covered in other categories. Finally, Traffic words are used by motorists. Although many other categories could be devised to include the entire 466 words and symbols found on the combined word list, the most frequently published functional sight words may be divided into these categories.

Several conclusions may be inferred from examining the words included in at least 50% of the published lists. Nearly 60% of these words mean "stay away" or tell the reader how to go in or out of buildings. However, some warnings (e.g., poison) are more critical to a person's safety than others (e.g., no smoking). Similarly, some in/out words (e.g., exit) may have more important consequences for a reader than others (e.g., down). Another intriguing finding is the inclusion of traffic words. Surely, words of higher priority exist for severely disabled readers than these traffic words!

To confirm the relative importance of the published high frequency words for instructional purposes, the combined list of 466 words was shared with 48 teachers of severely and moderately handicapped students. These professionals were instructed to select

thirty words that they felt were crucial for all readers to know. A total of 181 different words were selected by the teachers, indicating that little consensus existed even among this group. Only 14 words were selected by at least 50% of all teachers. These words are also shown on Table 2. When teacher word selections are compared to publisher word selections, some interesting differences are revealed. Teachers were far more selective in choosing warning words than publishers (4 words vs 12 words). Teachers never selected traffic words and they included only one go in/out word (i.e., exit) with substantial frequency. In addition, teachers chose two words (i.e., toilet and telephone) not included by at least one-half of the publishers. In sum, teachers tended to identify lavatory words, warnings, and wait/don't wait words, while publishers were more concerned with warnings and go in/ out words.

Due to the discrepancies observed between the percentage of publishers and teachers word selections, the average percentage of selection by both groups was obtained for each word. The words were then rank ordered within each category based on their combined averages (refer to Table 2).

This rank ordering may be used by teachers for instructional purposes. If words included by at least 50% of the publishers and

teachers are selected, then 15 words would be taught. These words could be taught individually or grouped by category. Hopefully, the words in such a list would comprise the most frequent and most important words an individual may encounter in his/her environment.

Categories of functional sight vocabulary words can be prioritized according to a student's perceived needs. Warnings might constitute the highest instructional priority. Warnings which are not needed may endanger a person's life. Lavatory words might be the second priority if a student is expected to go to restaurants, gas stations, or other commercial businesses. A knowledge of wait/don't wait words permits a certain degree of freedom in pedestrian mobility. Finally, go in/out words are helpful in stores of all kinds.

Once students master the 15 basic sight words, other words from Table 1 could constitute the next instructional priority. Then, the teacher would be advised to refer to the combined word list and to select sets of words based on their functionaly utility for the student. In this manner, teachers could expand the functional sight vocabulary of their students in stages.

Conclusion

Functional sight vocabularies are especially useful for students who are not expected to become proficient readers. Knowledge of these words promotes independence and some degree of safety in the home

and community. Since little agreement exists on the composition of a functional sight vocabulary, the following recommendations may guide teachers in the selection and instruction of those words which their students should learn.

Use common sense. Only words which are of high utility or which are commonly found in the community should be taught. Prudence should be exercised in using commercially published games and activities for instruction in functional sight words. Also be wary of commercially published games and activities for instruction of Functional Sight Words. These materials often have few words of practical use for a person who does not drive. Furthermore, some common words and phrases may be unnecessary if the student is taught the rule rather than the word. Thus, it is unnecessary to teach the phrases "Do not talk to the operator" or "Have fare ready when boarding bus" if students are merely instructed not to talk to the bus driver and always to have their fare ready. However, it may be helpful to teach the words "bus" and "bus stop".

Limit the number of words. Students with an extremely limited reading potential should not be required to learn 50 or 100 words. In fact, few students with limited reading potential need to learn all of the words on the combined Functional Sight Vocabulary word list. A rule of thumb is to concentrate on those words that are basic to the needs of an individual.

Teach symbols as well as words. Universal symbols are replacing printed words on signs in many areas of the country at a rapid rate. The "Mr. Yuk" symbol is an example of this phenomenon. Many pharmeceutical companies are adopting this symbol in place of the word poison on their merchandise. In addition transit systems and telephone companies identify their services with easily identifiable symbols. These common symbols should be included in a functional sight vocabulary.

Teach comprehension as well as recognition. It goes without saying that the purpose of teaching a functional sight vocabulary is to provide students with a set of appropriate responses to use when confronted with certain words and symbols. Therefore, whenever possible, words should be taught in a concrete and realistic manner. Primary emphasis should be placed on appropriate responses to words. Obviously, it would be of little help for a student to be able to identify the word "men" if he didn't understand that the word meant that this is the place you go to use the toilet if you are of the male species.

Functional sight vocabulary words represent the specialized set of words that surround people in their environment and that warn them of danger, provide directions or information, and indicate the location of services and public facilities. Knowledge of these words is

especially important for those persons of limited reading ability since it increases the likelihood of being better able to function safely and more independently in everyday situations.

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Thurston Finsbury 1979

COMBINED FUNCTIONAL SIGHT VOCABULARY LIST

Accident ward
Account number
Address
Adults only
Age
Airport
All cars stop
All terms cash
Alley closed
Always be careful
Ambulance
Antidotes
Apartment
Apply within
Appetiser
Ask attendant for key
Authorized personnel only
Ave.
Avenue

Baggage
Balance
Bank
Barber shop
Beauty shop
Beauty salon
Bell
Bell out of order
Beware
Beware of crosswinds
Beware of the dog
*Bike
*Bike route
*Bike trail
Board
Boy
Box office
Boy wanted
Bridge
Bridge out
*Bus
Bus only
Bus station
Bus stop

Cab
Cab stop
*Camping
Cashier
Cattle crossing
Caution
Charge account
*Children
City
City hall
Closed
Closed for repairs
C.O.D.
Cold
Combustible
Condemned
Construction zone
Contaminated
Count your change
Court house
Cross here
Crossing
Curve
Customer service

Danger
Danger - cars
Dangerous curve
Date
Date due
Date of birth
D.D.S.
Dend end
Deductions
Deep water
Deer crossing
Dentist
Deposit
Deposit money
Desert
Detour
Dim lights
Diner
Dip
Discount
Doctor
Doctor's office
Do not ask for credit
Do not block walk
Do not cross
Do not crowd
Do not disturb
Do not enter
Do not inhale fumes
Do not push
Do not refreeze
Do not shove
Do not stand up
Do not use near heat
Do not use near open flame
Do not talk to operator
Don't walk
Down
Dr.
Drifting sands
Drive slow(ly)
Drugs
Duties
Dynamite

Earnings
Education
Electricity
Elevator
Emergency
Emergency entrance
Emergency exit
Emergency room
Emergency vehicles only
Employees only
Employment agency
Employment office
End 45
End construction
Enter
Entrance
Entre
Escalator
Exit
Exit only
Exit speed
Expenses
Explosive
External use only

Falling rocks
Fallout shelter
Fill in
Fire
Fire alarm
Fire escape
Fire extinguisher
*First aid
First, last, middle
Flammable
Flooded
Floods when raining
Food services
For rent
For sale
Found
Four way stop
Fragile
Freeway

Fresh paint

Gallon
Garage
Garbage
Gasoline
Gate
Gentlemen
Girl(s)
Girl wanted
Glass
Go
Go slow(ly)
Gross pay

Handle with care
Hands off
Have fare ready
Help
Help wanted
High voltage
*Hospital
Hospital zone
Hot
Hotel

In
In case of fire
Income tax
Inflammable
*Information
Inspection
Inspection station
Instructions
Insurance
Interest

Junction

Keep away
Keep closed at all times
Keep moving
Keep off
Keep out
Keep to the right
Keep to the left

Laborers wanted
Ladies
Lane ends
Last chance for gas
Last employer
Laundry
Lavatory
L.B.S.
Left
Left turn only
Left turn only on this signal
Letters
Library
License
Lifeguard
Listen
Live wire
Loading zone
Look
Look out for the cars
Lost and found

Magazine
Mail
Manager
Marital status
Married
Mechanic on duty
*Men
Men only
Menu
Men working
Merging traffic
Miss
Motel
Move to rear
M.P.H.
Mr.
Mrs.

Name
Net pay
New
Newspaper
Newstand
Next
Next window
Next gate
No admittance
No bicycles
*No bikes
No checks cashed
No credit
No diving
No dogs allowed
No driving
No dumping
*No entry
No fires
No fishing
No hitchhikers
No hunting
*No left turn
No littering
No loitering
No minors
No motorcycles
No motor vehicles
*No parking
No passing
*No right turn
No right turn on red
No smoking
No smoking area
No spitting
No standing
No stopping
No swimming
No swinging
No touching
No trespassing
No turn
*No "U" turn
Not a through street
Not for internal use
Not responsible for lost articles
Noxious
Nurse

Occupation
Off
Office
Office open
On
One way
One way - do not enter
One way street
One way traffic
Open
Open evenings
Operator
Out
Out of order
Overdue

Parcel post
*Parking
Parking lot

Pavement ends
Pay as you enter
Pay here
Peddling
*Pedestrian crossing
Pedestrians prohibited
Penalty for
Ped xing
Personnel office
Personal property
Physician
Piece work
Pint
Playground
Poison
Poisonous
Police
Police station
Posted
Post office
Post no bills
Press
Private
Private property
Private road
Proceed at your own risk
Pt.
Public telephone
Pull
Pull level
Pull lever
Push
Put on chains

Quart
Quiet
Quiet zone
Qt.

Railroad crossing
*Rail transit
Rd.
R.R.
R.R.xing
Receipt
Received
Refund
Restaurant
Restroom(s)
Resume speed
Right
Right lane must turn (right)
Right turn only
Road
Road closed
Road ends
Road narrows
Rooms

Safety first
Sale
Savings
School
*School crossing
School stop
School zone
Shallow water
Shelter
Shoplifters will be prosecuted
Sign here
Signature
Signals ahead
Single
Skilled
Slide area
*Slippery when wet
Slow
Slow down
Slower traffic keep right
Slower traffic keep left
Smoking prohibited
Social security
Social security number
Speed checked by radar
Speed limit
Speed zone ahead
St.
Stairs
Stamps
State
Statement
Step down
Step up
Steep grade
Stop
Stop ahead
Stop for pedestrians
Stop motor
Stop when occupied
Street
Subway
Swim at your own risk
Take one
Taxi
Taxi cab
Taxi stand
Telegram
*Telephone
Teller
Terms cash
Thin ice
This end up
This land turn left
This road patrolled by aircraft
This side up
This way out
This way up
Three way light
Ticket office
Ticket window
Toilet
Total
Traffic circle
*Traffic light
*Trail
Trains
Trash
Truck route
Turn off
Turn off __ mile
*Two way traffic

Unloading zone
Unskilled
Up
Use before
Use crosswalk
Use in fresh air
Use in open air
Use low gear
Use other door
Use other exit
U.S. Mail

Vacancy
Vacant
Violators will be prosecuted

Wage tax
Wait
Waiting room
Walk

Wanted
Warning
Washroom
Waste
Watch for children
Watch for flagman
Watch for low flying
  aircraft
Watch for traffic
Watch your step
Wet paint
Wholesale
Will be back at __
Winding road
Withdrawal
*Women
Women only
Women's toilet
Wrong way

Yield
Yield right of way

Zip code

* indicates that a symbol/word or symbol only is used for this word .

Table 2

• Percent of Publishers, & Teachers Selecting Functional Sight Vocabulary Words

Category	Pub.	Tch.	$\bar{X}$
Wait/Don't Wait			
stop	100	65	82.5
don't walk	63	77	70.0
walk	56	54	55.0
Lavatory			
men	50	90	70.0
women	63	77	70.0
restroom	50	77	63.5
Ladies	63	63	63.0
gentlemen	56	46	51.0
toilet	31	67	49.0
Go In/Out			
exit	69	96	82.5
entrance	63	42	52.5
closed	50	46	48.0
out	56	40	48.0
push	50	46	48.0
pull	50	44	47.0
down	56	29	42.5

Table 2 (cont.)

Category	Pub.	Tch.	$\bar{X}$
Warnings			
danger	63	92	77.5
poison	56	75	65.5
caution	63	52	57.5
keep out	63	52	57.5
do not enter	56	42	49.0
no smoking	56	40	48.0
no trespassing	63	25	44.0
keep off	50	29	39.5
no admittance	56	21	38.5
R. R.	69	6	37.5
high voltage	50	8	29.0
private	69	6	28.0
Other			
bus stop	56	44	50.0
telephone	25	67	46.0
fire escape	50	23	36.5
out of order	50	10	30.0
Traffic			
one way	56	0	28.0
no parking	50	0	25.0